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The strike on the Pennsylvania and Philadelphia & Reading railroads

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was the western terminus of the Pennsylvania Railroad's main line, which began in Philadelphia, and the starting point for the company's major branch lines—the Pittsburgh & Cleveland Railroad, the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago Railroad and the "Pan Handle" Railroad, otherwise known as the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis line. In 1876, about eight million dollars' worth of freight traffic passed through Pittsburgh, averaging slightly more than twenty thousand dollars per day. The Baltimore & Ohio and Erie companies had entrances into the city, but these were circuitous routes to the west; for all practical purposes, therefore, the Pennsylvania company held a monopoly over the city's commerce.

By 1877, hatred of the Pennsylvania Railroad had permeated all classes in Pittsburgh. A local physician observed that the city's businessmen "were bitter enemies of the road on account of the discrimination in freights that existed." Thus, it was frequently cheaper for a Pittsburgh merchant to ship goods to California via Boston than to ship them directly, and cheaper for a Chicago merchant to ship goods to Philadelphia than to Pittsburgh, even though they

had to pass through Pittsburgh en route.[1]

The lot of the Pennsylvania Railroad's workers was not much different from those on the B & O. To be sure, until June 1877 they had suffered only one wage cut, but they had been forced to tolerate an unusual amount of abuse. "Little under-officials treated us like dogs," observed Robert Ammon, who felt that abuse was the primary cause of the strike in Pittsburgh and Allegheny City. When a worker "signed up," he had to agree to the following rules, among others:

> The regular compensation of employes covers all risk or liability to accident.
>
> If an employe is disabled by sickness or any other cause, the right to claim compensation is not recognized.[2]

On top of this, the company refused to equip its freight trains with safety devices, and during the depression it made work on the main line more hazardous by doubling the size of its trains and reducing the number of men who worked on them. All westbound freights and eastbound coal trains, for example, had been made doubleheaders. This not only meant more work and heightened danger, but it also meant that nearly half the conductors, flagmen, and brakemen would be discharged. The following dialogue took place when a company official was asked how many men he was able to do without when he doubled up a train:

> A. If there were ten single trains and I doubled up, I saved five conductors and five flagmen and ten brakemen.
>
> Q. What became of those men?
>
> A. They were suspended.
>
> Q. But by suspension do you mean discharged, or do you mean suspension temporarily?
>
> A. They were given to understand that there was no more work.[3]

On July 16, Robert Pitcairn, general superintendent of the Pennsylvania's western division, posted a notice saying that beginning Thursday, July 19, all eastbound trains going as far as Altoona would henceforth be doubleheaders. Since all eastbound coal trains had long been doubleheaders, the order did not require much of a change in the workers' schedules. Pitcairn probably felt that it would hardly make any difference, and would only result in the usual amount of grumbling. ("The men were always complaining about something," he later said.) In the end, he felt, everything would go smoothly and he would be congratulated for having saved the Pennsylvania the wages of the brakemen, flagmen, and conductors who would soon be dismissed because of the laborsaving device.

But coming as it did so soon after the most recent reduction in wages, and on the day that the B & O workers quit their jobs, the notice was too much for the men to tolerate. As Ammon observed later: ". . . It was the wrong time to put on the double-headers just following the strike at Martinsburg. That just started the whole thing."[4]

In the early morning of July 19, freight trains left Pittsburgh as doubleheaders, but at 8:40 a.m. two brakemen and one flagman refused to go out on a doubleheader, and the train did not leave. The conductor notified the dispatcher that the men had struck, but when the dispatcher tried to find other men who would go out, all the trainmen refused. The dispatcher then tried to make up crews from the yard men, but the strikers prevented the engine from being coupled.

At this point, the strikers began using the same tactics developed on the Baltimore & Ohio. They took control of the switches over which the trains would have to move, and refused to let any of them pass out. Meanwhile, large groups of men, including striking miners from Wilkensburg and unemployed workers from Pittsburgh, assembled on the tracks and prevented the movement of freight trains, allowing only passenger and mail trains to pass. One or two attempts were made to start freight trains, but when an engine began moving, some of the crowd would step in front of it, swinging their hands, and the engineer would leave. When one engineer ap-

peared to persist, he was told that he had "better not go . . . that they did not want to hurt him but would not let him through." He left the engine. When a company man warned a striker that he would regret what he was doing, the reply came: "It is a question of bread or blood, and if I go to the penitentiary I can get bread and water, and that is about all I can get now."[5]

Pitcairn, having heard no complaints about his doubleheader order, had left Pittsburgh for Philadelphia two hours before the strike began, leaving his assistant, David Watt, in charge. When news of the strike reached Watt, he went to see Pittsburgh's mayor, William McCarthy, and asked him if he would come to the station with ten constables and speak to the strikers. McCarthy argued that since a recent lack of funds had forced the city to reduce its police force to eleven men, only nine of whom worked during the daytime, he could not spare them. As for going to the station himself, the mayor explained that he could not see that a disturbance requiring only ten men also required "the city to go there in the person of the mayor." However, in the end, McCarthy instructed Detective Charles McGovern to ask for volunteers and to accompany Watt to the station. After considerable difficulty, ten men were secured and left with Watt and McGovern.[6]

When they got to Twenty-eighth Street, they found the strikers in possession of the main yard switch, and after a run-in with a striker, Watt was struck in the eye. The striker was arrested and taken to the Twelfth Ward's police station. Watt wired Mayor McCarthy for fifty more policemen, but only six or seven arrived. Leaving McGovern in charge at Twenty-eighth Street, Watt went to the company's stock yards at Torrens, accompanied by his assistant, David Garrett. There they found that the strikers would not permit a loaded cattle train to leave, and after failing to persuade them they got the train out by trickery. That was the last train to leave Pittsburgh for over a week.[7]

Watt tried to get more police assigned, but he learned that the mayor had left town to visit his sick wife, and that nobody else would act with authority in his absence. He was advised to go to the sher-

iff. A little after midnight, by which time the crowd numbered about five hundred, Hugh M. Fife, sheriff of Allegheny County, spurred into action by the company, urged the strikers and their sympathizers to disperse and go to their homes. The sheriff, in turn, was told to go to *his* home, and that no freight trains would leave until the difficulty with the company was settled. Sheriff Fife thereupon threw up his hands and withdrew.[8]

By the next morning, more than nine hundred loaded cars stood idle. The strike was completely effective, and, although large crowds of unemployed workers and curious onlookers roamed the streets, order prevailed. A mass meeting of the Trainmen's Union (which had sprung to life again) was attended by representatives of each class of railroad workers—engineers (who, although at first in sympathy with the strike, had up to then been unwilling to join for fear of being dismissed), firemen, conductors, and brakemen. Resolutions were unanimously adopted, and a committee consisting of five members, one from each branch, was elected to present them to the company. The resolutions affirmed the strikers' determination not to go back to work until the wage reduction was rescinded, the doubleheader edict withdrawn, the new classification system abolished, and all strikers reemployed. After interviewing the men as they left Phoenix Hall, a reporter for the *National Labor Tribune,* published in Pittsburgh, wrote: "These men merely want to live—and do not want their wives and little ones to starve, which they must certainly do if they are compelled to accept the terms of the company and go to work."[9]

"There is no disguising the matter. The people of this city sympathize with the strikers. They are incensed beyond measure with the cold, corrupt legislation which has fostered the colder and more corrupt organization known as the Pennsylvania Railroad." This observation by the *Pittsburgh Critic* was later endorsed by a legislative committee that investigated the strike. "A large portion of the people," the committee pointed out, "also believed that the railroad company was not dealing fairly by its men in making the last reduction in wages, and the tradesmen with whom the trainmen dealt

also had a direct sympathy with the men in this reduction, for its results would affect their pockets." The committee continued:

> The workers in the different mills, manufacturers, mines, and other industries in Pittsburgh and vicinity, were also strongly in sympathy with the railroad strikers, considering the cause of the railroad men their cause, as their wages had also been reduced for the same causes as were those of the railroad men, and they were not only willing but anxious to make a common fight against the corporations.

On Friday, July 20, the committee appointed at the Trainmen's Union's mass meeting met Alexander Cassatt and Robert Pitcairn, representing the company, and presented them with the strikers' demands. Cassatt, the third vice-president of the company, interpreted the document as an attempt on the part of the strikers to usurp control of the railroad. "They proposed taking the road out of our hands," he later said, horrified over the memory of the incident. Pitcairn was equally shocked. "I told them I could not possibly send such a paper to Mr. Scott," he recollected. "It was everything. . . . I have got the paper. . . . There are about four, or five, or six demands."[10]

An attempt was made by some of Pittsburgh's leading citizens to induce the company to at least make a counteroffer so that a compromise might be worked out, but the railroad officials would not even listen. The workers had taken the law into their own hands, they insisted, and it was up to the authorities to uphold the law. That was the long and short of it.[11]

Clearly, the Pennsylvania's management was growing impatient. Sensing that the people of Pittsburgh did indeed support the strikers they began to maneuver for outside help. After Sheriff Fife's perfunctory and futile call to the crowd to disperse, John Scott, the general solicitor of the Pennsylvania, drew up a telegram which the sheriff signed, and which was sent to Adjutant General James W. Latta. (Governor John F. Hartranft was junketing in far-off Wyo-

ming Territory at railroad expense, and had given his adjutant general explicit instructions that if any disturbance occurred during his absence, he was to assume the powers ordinarily vested in the office of the state's chief executive.) After going on at some length about "intimidation" and "violence," and "molesting and obstructing," Sheriff Fife's wire (composed by Scott) concluded:

> As the sheriff of the county, I have endeavored to suppress the riot, and have not adequate means at my command to do so, and I, therefore, request you to exercise your authority in calling out the military to suppress the same.

Latta immediately ordered General A.J. Pearson to call out one regiment of the Sixth Division located in Pittsburgh. Pearson was able to muster only 250 of his 326 men, but fearing that the majority of these militiamen sympathized with the strikers, he telegraphed Latta warning of this danger, and suggested that troops from Philadelphia be dispatched to Pittsburgh. The latter, in the governor's name, at once telegraphed Major General Brinton, commanding the First Division of the National Guard in Philadelphia, to prepare his command to move to Pittsburgh. At two o'clock in the morning of July 21, six hundred militiamen left Philadelphia for Pittsburgh, stopping off in Harrisburg for two Gatling guns and ammunition.[12]

Company officials were overjoyed. Tom Scott boasted that he would settle "this business with Philadelphia troops." He was confident that the militiamen, fresh from the influence of the banking and mercantile center, would not fraternize with the "mob."[13]

"The insane policy of calling Philadelphia troops to quell domestic quarrel is reprehensible beyond degree," a Pittsburgh paper commented.[14] But even this was an understatement. The folly of using any troops in such a volatile situation was only compounded by the request for militia troops from Philadelphia. The animosity that existed between Pennsylvania's two major cities was hardly a secret, and Pittsburghers felt many grievances against Philadelphia, not the least of which was the fact that the home office of the Penn-

sylvania Railroad was located there.[15] Their anger was further aroused by reports that *en route* to their city, the militiamen had boasted that they were going to clean up the workingmen's town. Even the *Army Journal* admitted that the Philadelphians were spoiling for a fight.[16]

Saturday, July 21, a day long to be remembered by Pittsburghers, dawned bright and beautiful. The strikers had remained stationed along the line during the entire night. Early the next morning, they were joined by rolling-mill men, mechanics, the unemployed, and women and children. Regiments of the Pittsburgh militia were stationed near the strikers and their sympathizers. The soldiers joked and fraternized with the crowd. Most of the time their arms were stacked. The strikers let them know that they would resist any attempt to start a freight train out under the doubleheader order.

It was the custom for the different mills and shops in Pittsburgh and its vicinity to shut down at about noon on Saturday. Fearing that the sudden increase in the crowd following such shutdowns would create complications, several Pittsburgh manufacturers approached Vice-President Cassatt and urged him not to attempt to open the road that afternoon, but rather to wait until Monday afternoon, when the mills would be operating. They pointed out that it was natural that the local militia "should sympathize with the strikers" and therefore could not be depended upon in case of a riot. To call in the Philadelphia troops under these circumstances, they insisted, was fraught with the utmost danger.

But Cassatt refused to delay. The company, he said, had already lost a great deal of time, and it was the duty of the government to open the road regardless of the consequences.[17]

Following this conversation, a meeting of the strikers was organized. Dr. E. Donnelly, the main speaker, urged the strikers to be prudent in their reaction to the troops from Philadelphia, and not to resort to violence:

> They are not, you may say, your brothers. . . . These men will come here strangers to you, and they will come here regarding

> you as we regarded the rebels during the rebellion, and there will be no friendly feeling between you and them. For this reason, I implore you, for God's sake, to stand back when they arrive. . . . I have been informed by the men who are leading the strike that they will exercise the greatest caution and forbearance when the soldiers arrive, and I entreat you to stand back and let them manage the thing in their own way.

The speech was greeted with cheers, and before the meeting adjourned, the strikers adopted resolutions assuring the community that no effort would be made to interfere with passenger traffic or the U.S. mail trains; that a full crew of men would be furnished, free of charge, to move all city freight then in the yards that was intended for Pittsburgh firms, but that, under no circumstances, would through freight be allowed to be moved "until we are allowed sufficient wages for our labor to keep our families from actual want." The final resolution expressed appreciation for "the sympathy so fully tendered us by the public at large."[18]

At about one o'clock in the afternoon of July 21, a passenger train arrived at the Pittsburgh Union Depot. From six cars, uniformed Philadelphians emerged, armed and equipped with blankets. An hour later, another train arrived with several hundred more Philadelphians. The six hundred soldiers were furnished with refreshments at the depot; and when news came that the railroad officials wanted to send out a freight train immediately, the order was given for the Philadelphia troops to occupy those positions at which the most resistance was likely to come from the strikers and their sympathizers.

The news of the troop's arrival brought a vast assemblage of men, women, and children to the Outer Depot, where the freight trains lay idle. The crowd was quiet and orderly. At five o'clock in the afternoon, cries of "There they come!" arose. All eyes were turned toward the Union Depot. In the distance was seen a solid column of soldiers, marching steadily toward the Outer Depot, their bayonets glistening in the sun. At the head of the soldiers were Superin-

tendent Pitcairn of the Pennsylvania Railroad, Sheriff Fife, and a posse of constables and police officers. The sheriff, the constables, and the police were accompanying the troops to arrest the strike leaders on a warrant issued by Judge Ewing at the request of solicitors for the Pennsylvania Railroad. The unnamed ringleaders were charged with riot.

As the troops approached the Outer Depot, the silence was broken by a storm of hisses, hoots, and yells. The women led the hissing and urged the men to outdo them in jeering at the Philadelphians. As the soldiers began pushing the crowd back so as to clear the tracks, the cries and yells grew louder and fiercer. Regiments of the local militia mingled with the crowd, and a number of its members urged the Philadelphians to "take it easy." Several strikers joined the refrain, and one shouted, "You sympathize with our cause, and you wouldn't shoot a workingman!"

At that very moment, an order was issued to the Philadelphia "Dark Blues" to charge with fixed bayonets. The soldiers responded, and several people were stabbed. When the crowd saw the blood trickling from these men, an angry roar arose. At this point, several boys let loose a volley of stones at the soldiers.

The command "Fire!" rang out, and immediately the troops began firing directly into the crowd. The panic-stricken men, women, and children, trapped and unarmed, surged in all directions, and several fell. The reporter for the *Pittsburgh Post* wrote:

> Women and children rushed frantically about, some seeking safety, others calling for friends and relatives. Strong men halted with fear, and trembling with excitement, rushed madly to and fro, tramping upon the killed and wounded as well as upon those who had dropped to mother earth to escape injury and death.

Bodies dripping with blood and writhing in agony were lifted off the ground and carried to undertakers' establishments, to physicians' offices, and to private residences. The members of the local militia, who had watched the shooting into the crowd with horror,

had to be restrained from firing on the soldiers from Philadelphia. But in their fury, they tore off their uniforms and left them on the ground.[19]

Within a few minutes, at least twenty were dead (including one member of Pittsburgh's Sixth Division) and twenty-nine maimed or wounded by the Philadelphia citizen-soldiers. The dead included a woman and three small children. A grand jury investigation termed the action of the troops "an unauthorized, willful and wanton killing . . . which the inquest can call by no other name than murder."[20]

Even before the full casualty list was known, the headlines in the *Pittsburgh Sunday Globe Extra* screamed:

FIRST BLOOD
Seventeen Citizens Shot in Cold Blood by the
Roughs of Philadelphia.
The Lexington of the Labor Conflict At Hand.
The Slaughter of the Innocents.[21]

As the word of the massacre spread through the city, thousands of workers from the rolling mills, coal mines, and factories hurried to the scene of the killings. The angry crowds forced the Philadelphians to retreat to the roundhouse, where a siege began. Within fifteen minutes, the crowd had broken every window in the building. Only a last-minute decision prevented the soldiers from responding with the Gatling guns. A wagon bringing food for the soldiers was seized by the crowd.

With the Sixth Division practically disbanded, the police nowhere to be found, and the Philadelphia militiamen besieged in the roundhouse, the crowd had full control of the city. The aroused citizenry, determined to avenge the murders, put the railroad's property to the torch. The fire alarms were cut, but an alarm was somehow sent in. The first department responded, but upon arriving within a block of the fire, the engines were stopped by the crowd. Meanwhile, the striking of the alarms was a signal for thousands of additional people from all parts of the city to proceed to the scene of the blaze.[22]

The fire continued to spread until "it looked as if half the city would be burned."[23] Every car on the track between the roundhouse and Twenty-third Street was destroyed. Before this, however, men, women, and children broke into the cars and carried off everything they could get their hands on. An onlooker wrote later:

> People were hurrying up the hill [overlooking the railroad tracks] with all kinds of shipping cases, webs of cloth, silk, brooms, hams, bacon, umbrellas, liquor of every kind, in fact every conceivable kind of portable merchandise. . . .
>
> Many women were carrying flour in their aprons and anything else they could get hold of that might be useful or that they thought had a value.[24]

In its report, the state legislative committee stressed the role of the women in urging "the mob to resistance," and pointed out that "during Saturday night and Sunday, they [the women] brought tea and coffee to the men engaged in the destruction of property and were the most active in carrying away goods taken from the cars." What the report failed to mention was that in the testimony it took, the fact was emphasized that if the goods had not been taken, they would have been destroyed by fire.[25]

On Sunday afternoon, as the fires were raging, a mass meeting of citizens was hastily called, and a committee of five appointed to confer with the state, county, and city authorities, the strikers and other workingmen, and the Pennsylvania Railroad officials "to secure the protection of property from wanton destruction, and an arrangement of the difficulties between the company and the striking employees." In taking this action, however, the meeting pledged the citizens' "faith to the working men that we have no purpose to facilitate the introduction of an armed force, but look solely to the protection of the rights of all by amicable means."

Immediately after the meeting adjourned, Bishop Tuigg, a member of the committee of five, hurried to the scene of destruction. Standing on a steaming locomotive, with his face blackened with

the smoke and soot of the fire, he pleaded with all in the crowd, and especially those who were Catholics, to return to their homes. There had been faults on both sides, he maintained, and it was not his intention or that of the committee he represented "to condemn this party and uphold that." A voice interrupted: "What did the Philadelphia soldiers begin shooting for, and why did they kill innocent women and children?" Bishop Tuigg had no answer, but he assured the crowd that "on the authority of the citizens whom I represent, your wages will be raised to the old standard. I know that the citizens will do everything in their power to get back your wages." This brought applause and shouts of "That's all we want!" "Give us a chance to live!" But when Bishop Tuigg asked the crowd to disperse and give his committee twenty-four hours to consult with the railroad company, the crowd lost patience and resumed its destruction of railroad property.[26]

The fire extended through the freight cars for three miles to the city's limits. It enveloped 39 buildings of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 104 engines, 46 passenger cars, and over 1,200 freight cars. All of the buildings extending from Union Depot to Twenty-eighth Street that lay between Liberty Street and Penn Avenue were burned, as were all of the buildings in the vicinity of the Union Depot. The depot was ignited at about three o'clock, and the fire crackled for an hour and a half before the building was entirely consumed. At around five o'clock, the flames began lapping at a great grain elevator which stood beside Union Depot. It was 150 feet high and 80 feet square and took three hours to burn. The fire department was not permitted to throw a drop of water on it, although it was permitted to save the private property across the street.

With nothing left to burn, the rioters started to trickle home. Subsequently, the Pennsylvania filed claims against Allegheny County for destruction totalling $4.1 million, and was awarded almost $3 million.[27]

The Philadelphia soldiers spent Saturday night in the roundhouse and the adjoining depot, supperless. But food was the least of the soldiers' worries. At midnight, cars with burning coal and petro-

leum were run down the track and against the sand house, a large building near the roundhouse, which was soon in flames. However, the roundhouse was saved when the soldiers used a hose belonging to the railroad company.

At about six o'clock the next morning, the smoke from the burning railroad cars seeped into the roundhouse and began to choke the men inside. An hour and a half later, the soldiers left the roundhouse, marching in a column of fours down Penn Avenue. As they marched along, they were followed by an infuriated crowd. Arms and ammunition shops were raided, and the soldiers were fired upon from street corners, alleyways, windows, and housetops. The Philadelphians returned the fire, and in the ensuing skirmish some twenty more Pittsburghers were killed, along with two or three of the soldiers, while an uncounted number of citizens and several soldiers were wounded.

When the Philadelphians reached the United States Arsenal, they were refused admission by its commandant, Major Buffington, on the ground that to do so would bring the wrath of the crowd down upon him. From there, and after leaving their wounded in the arsenal, the soldiers marched over the bridge and finally reached Claremont, where the command bivouacked and remained until they were ordered by Adjutant General Latta to return to Philadelphia.[28]

The events in Pittsburgh plunged the country into a frenzy of hysteria. "Madness rules the hour," screamed the *Missouri Republican.* "Nothing in the history of this country shows so extensive and continuous a reign of anarchy." "We are now in the presence of a great danger," warned the *Washington* (D.C.) *National Republican,* "which threatens to overthrow all law and social order, and, if not checked, to destroy our civilization itself, and plunge the country into Barbarism." The *Chicago Inter-Ocean* called the events in Pittsburgh "America's First Great Revolution"; the most the *New York Times* could bring itself to say was: "God help us, if these are the rewards of freedom."[29]

Sobered by the carnage, Pittsburgh itself settled down. Order was restored by organized patrols of strikers and citizen volunteers. On

Monday morning, July 23, the Fourteenth and Nineteenth regiments were recalled to duty.

Meanwhile, the strike not only continued but spread to other industries. The employees of the National Tube Works joined the railroad workers, and, in a marching brigade, closed down all the mills in the area, including the huge Edgar Thomson Steel Works. Thousands of iron and steel workers and coal miners, as well as railroad workers, were now out in a giant strike.[30]

On Monday evening, July 23, the railroad strikers issued a statement placing "responsibility" for the destruction of the previous two days squarely on the shoulders of Thomas A. Scott for having refused to negotiate with the men and thereby avoid the terrible tragedy:

> For the disorder, the outrages, the murders, the incendiarism, the awful responsibility rests alone upon the officials of the Pennsylvania Company. . . .
>
> We wish the public to distinctly understand that before and since the destruction of property and loss of life, we have done our part seeking a conference to settle the differences between us and the company, but we have not been deemed worthy of an answer from the officers of the P.R.R. Company.[31]

The strikers' request for a meeting with company officials to settle the dispute received wide support in Pittsburgh. James P. Barr, the editor of the *Pittsburgh Post,* not only published a lead editorial entitled "Why Not Arbitration?" pleading with the Pennsylvania's management to submit the issues to "arbitration *at once,*" but appealed personally to Colonel Scott in Philadelphia

> . . . to agree to a board of arbitration to present a compromise, which will relieve you and labor without disturbing the rights or grievances of either. . . . You have it in your power to restore peace and preserve society. . . . I implore you not to assume the ground that the military can settle anything but defiance of law. Have

this compromise effected at once, and the country will owe you a debt of gratitude.

But Scott was convinced that the "military" would "settle" the strike in the interest of the corporation, and he rejected the plea.[32]

Small wonder, then, that with all the destruction and increasing shortages, community sympathy still remained with the strikers. "I don't think they [the citizens of Pittsburgh] cared much for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, even if it was burned up," Robert Ammon explained later.[33]

For three days, young Ammon was in complete control of Allegheny City—the important railway center on the Pennsylvania line, just across the river from Pittsburgh—which was the terminus of the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago, the Allegheny Valley, the Pan Handle, and the Connelsville division of the Baltimore & Ohio. The strikers at Allegheny City, all members of the Trainmen's Union, accepted Ammon's leadership and agreed to follow his advice to use no violence to prevent trains from running, and to let the freight trains go through if the company could get scabs to run them. Since the Pennsylvania Railroad was unable to find such men, the strikers' willingness to let the freight trains through was never tested.

Ammon told Mayor O. Phillips that the strikers would try to protect company property, and in return the mayor promised that as long as the situation remained peaceful, no troops would be summoned. The strikers stopped over ten miles of freight trains, organized regular shifts to guard them, requested that all saloons be closed, and worked in close cooperation with city authorities. When a rumor spread that a Pittsburgh mob was coming to destroy the railroad property, engineers took the engines out of the roundhouse, and the ten miles of cars were hauled out from the city and stowed away on side tracks until the strikes were over.

Then the strikers heard that the Seventh Division of the Pennsylvania Guard had been summoned to Allegheny City. Considering this a violation of the agreement with the mayor, Ammon and

the strikers' committee prepared an appropriate reception. The ten miles of freight cars were moved further away, so as to be out of the line of fire; citizens were warned to stay home; the strikers equipped themselves with guns and brickbats, dug trenches, and threw up barriers a mile in front of the city, planted two guns at either side of the road, and settled down to wait. Every passenger train was stopped; a number of strikers went on board, and after being satisfied that there were no military among the passengers, allowed it to proceed.

Late Saturday night, July 21, Ammon received news that the statewide traffic tie-up had prevented the soldiers from coming. He thereupon instructed his men to abandon their positions and go back to guarding the freight trains.

On Sunday afternoon, July 22, Ammon took control of the dispatcher's office of the Fort Wayne and personally conducted the company's passenger traffic until the following Tuesday. On Monday, he worked in close cooperation with the company's officials, particularly its general manager, J.D. Layng, and also with Mayor Phillips, who sent him twenty-five constables to help guard the freight cars. When he heard that Governor Hartranft was coming to Allegheny City on his return from his western tour, he wired ahead to welcome him and to assure him of safe passage. Upon the governor's arrival on Tuesday, July 24, Ammon told the strikers to bring the freight cars back and turn the railroad over to its officers. Later that night, he urged the strikers to return to work and leave it to the railroad to settle their grievances.

It was at this point that "Boss" Ammon met his first opposition. Several strikers objected to his proposal to call off the strike, and when he persisted in his stand, he was hissed and shouted down. Infuriated, Ammon resigned his leadership and went home. But he had succeeded in antagonizing Chief of Police W.D. Ross, who was jealous of his managerial ability; he was arrested on July 30, but never brought to trial. As the Pennsylvania legislative committee commented: "Thus fell from his position of boss the man who, with only eleven months' experience as a brakeman, for four or five days

successfully ran one division of a great railroad."[34]

After Ammon's withdrawal, the strike continued in full force in Allegheny City and was even extended to the workers in the machine and carpentry shops. The strikers remained cool and firm, maintaining excellent order and continuing to protect the company's property. Some remained on guard for forty-eight hours at a stretch to prevent looting. While no freight trains left the city, mail and passenger trains were dispatched.[35]

Meanwhile, the strike had spread through Pennsylvania into every major laboring town in the state. On July 22, brakemen and firemen in Philadelphia, the headquarters of the Pennsylvania Railroad, left their posts and asked the officers of the company to halt all freight traffic. Tom Scott, aware that he could not continue operations (the engineers left their trains and went home), prudently agreed. In the city itself, business came almost to a standstill, since no one could hope to ship or receive any supplies by rail. Soon the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which ran from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, was completely paralyzed, and elsewhere, too, company officials were unable to move any trains. In Altoona, the classic railroad town and the first stop on the Pennsylvania's main line going east from Pittsburgh, workers and sympathizers ranged throughout the city. When two militia trains attempted to pass through to Pittsburgh, they were attacked by the crowds. One detachment of troops surrendered and, after being fed by their captors, agreed to return home to Philadelphia. On their way home from Altoona, some of the militia were "recaptured" in Harrisburg, wined, dined, and sent on their way.[36]

In the nervous capital city of Harrisburg itself, Sheriff W.W. Jennings demonstrated restraint and intelligence in dealing with the inevitable large crowds that surrounded railroad property, and bloodshed was avoided.[37] In Erie, Pennsylvania, a large group of passengers, marooned by the strike, signed a statement denouncing the railroad company and praising its employees for their courtesy and kindness. (The strikers had even paid the hotel expenses for some of the travelers.) It was from Erie, too, that a "Committee

of Firemen, Brakemen & Citizens" wired President Hayes on July 24 that the Lake Shore Railroad had refused to allow mail to move. "We would be pleased," they informed the president, "if you would in some way direct them to proceed with mails and also passengers."[38]

In practically every town and city of Pennsylvania where the presence of the railroad was felt (except in Philadelphia, where the mayor banned all meetings), there were public gatherings in support of the strikers. Most ended without any violence. But in some communities across the state, the repressive force of the railroad companies and their allies in government was brought into play. In Johnstown, where troops were stoned, several workers were shot. It was in Reading, however, that the next great tragedy in Pennsylvania took place.

That city's income was derived principally from the Philadelphia & Reading Iron & Coal Company, which, in turn, depended upon the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad. Both of these enterprises were under the leadership of Franklin B. Gowen, who had become their president in 1868. As we have seen, Gowen had just recently made even more bitter enemies of the city's workers by forcing his men to choose between the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and his company, and by personally securing the hanging of ten "Molly Maguires" in nearby Mauch Chunk. A month after the executions, many of his three hundred former engineers, who had chosen to remain with their union, still lingered around Reading, blacklisted and embittered. The Irish Catholic miners of Reading nursed a deep resentment against the man who had crushed their union and railroaded their comrades to their death.

Their feeling was shared by many Reading workers, and was expressed in the words of a song which spread through the city:

> There's an army of strikers,
> Determined you'll see,
> Who will fight corporations
> Till the country is free.[39]

On July 22, 1877, the *Daily Eagle,* Reading's leading paper, noted that "popular sympathy" in the city was with the strikers in every railroad center, who had had their wages repeatedly reduced until their pay merely covered the bare necessities of life:

> The last turn of the screw cut into the live flesh, and they rebelled against the extortions and tyranny of the corporations which used their enormous capital for their own ends, regardless of the rights and suffering of the working people.

It was the railroad corporations, the paper pointed out, that had struck the first blow, and the strikers were fighting back against tremendous odds:

> The corporations have got a terrible advantage over their laborers in times like these. Labor is the underdog. The corporations can dictate their own terms, adopt what rules they please, pay just such wages as they see fit to allow, and the poor laborer can either accept what is graciously given or suffer the consequences which is virtually starvation. The corporations have the law on their side. They own the Legislatures. They retain the ablest lawyers. They control most of the newspapers and manufacture public opinion. And if the laborers protest in the only way that is left to them to assert their manhood, and contend for the rights of human nature and American citizenship, they are branded as rioters, met by force of arms, provoked to violence, and then shot dead.

Little did the *Eagle* realize that it was predicting precisely what would soon happen in Reading. When the news from Pittsburgh reached them, the workers of the city, long restive under the grip of Gowen's Philadelphia & Reading Railroad, spontaneously seized the railroad property. The company immediately moved to deal with the situation by calling for the militia. Just as promptly, the Reading Rifles made it clear that, while they would report for duty, "if or-

dered to fire, they will lay down their arms; that they are workingmen and do not desire to kill other workingmen."[40]

The company then called on Major General William J. Boston, who commanded the Second Division of Pennsylvania's National Guard. Boston at once sent one of his trusted aides, Brigadier General Frank Reeder, to Reading with the Fourth and Sixteenth regiments. The result was reported by the grief-stricken editor of the *Reading Daily Eagle:*

> The EAGLE has never been called upon to chronicle a more horrible slaughter of its peaceful and law-abiding citizens as it is its duty to-day. In the very heart of the city shortly after eight o'clock last night, took place one of the most terrible butcheries that has ever disgraced the pages of Reading's local history. The pavements, sidewalks and streets in the vicinity of 7th and Penn Streets, were literally baptized in blood; neighboring drug stores were for the time transformed into hospitals and operating rooms, and the dead and dying were carried home to their families they had left in health and strength but a short time before. It was the old story of military interference and military blunder over again, blunder whose absolute law is and has been for all time that the innocent are shot and the guilty escape.[41]

Night had settled upon the city when the militiamen marched in from the depot and proceeded to Seventh and Penn streets, where thousands of men, women, and children had gathered to witness the blockading of the tracks by the strikers. A few young men threw bricks and stones as the soldiers marched along. Suddenly, and without any warning whatsoever, the troops fired volley after volley in quick succession into the assemblage of men, women, and children. At first, it was thought that the volleys were blank cartridges fired in the air, but when several fell seriously wounded, panic ensued. Men, women, and children ran for their lives. All along Seventh Street, people were sitting at their doors and windows enjoy-

ing the cool air of the evening. They leaped up and disappeared, closing doors and windows after them. At Seventh and Penn streets, a large force of policemen was on duty and had succeeded in keeping the pavements and sidewalks clear. Before they could grasp what was happening, five of their number were shot and seriously wounded.

The military fired up and down Seventh Street and up and down Penn Street. Men dropped like flies. Rifle balls penetrated the large plate glass windows of business houses, and some of the store fronts were riddled. In all, ten Reading citizens were killed and forty wounded![42]

"The shooting down of quiet, inoffensive citizens at Seventh and Penn Streets, and the wounding of good citizens who were standing in the doors of their residences by the militia is little better than cold-blooded murder," the *Daily Eagle* cried out in fury. The entire city agreed, and was even more enraged by the testimony of Sheriff R. Yorgey that he had never been called upon by any officer, "either civil or military . . . in reference to quelling the disturbance"; that he had had "no notice whatever that any troops were coming that night; . . . had no information of the troops being in the city, and knew nothing of their presence until I heard the firing": "I was never consulted in reference to the military at all."[43] In short, Franklin P. Gowen and other officials of the Philadelphia & Reading had simply ignored the civil authorities and moved to deal with the situation themselves. Clearly, the company considered itself to be the real authority in Reading.

On July 28, Gowen informed Sheriff Yorgey that Major General Hancock was sending United States troops to Reading and that if the sheriff cooperated, he was certain they would "be able to keep the peace."[44] It was true, for only federal troops were able to restore order to the troubled city. The fires that had been started as an answer to the shooting of innocent citizens were extinguished, and the uprising in Reading began to subside.[45]

The same pattern was unfolding elsewhere in the state. Railroad officials stubbornly refused to arbitrate and placed all their depen-

dence on the federal and state authorities to break the strike. Federal officials were keeping in touch with local and state officials throughout the nation through the U.S. Signal Service. In Washington, at the Soldiers' Home (once the favorite summer retreat of Abraham Lincoln), President Hayes was receiving regular reports, including those from Governor Hartranft urging him to use U.S. troops to restore order in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania's first call for federal help came on July 22 in a wire from Harrisburg sent in Hartranft's name by Adjutant General James W. Latta and Matthew S. Quay, secretary of the commonwealth. (The governor, it will be recalled, was vacationing in Wyoming Territory and had delegated to Latta the power to act in his name to quell any disturbance.) The wire read:

> Domestic violence existing in the state of Penn[sylvani]a—in the city of Pittsb[ur]g and along the line Penn[sylvani]a Railroad and other railroads in said state which the authorities are unable to suppress and the legislature of Pennsylvania cannot be convened in time to meet the emergency. I have therefore to request in conformity to the Constitution the Government of the United States shall furnish me with military force sufficient to suppress disorder.[46]

This wire brought no response, and at seven o'clock that evening, Hartranft personally wired the president from Creston in Wyoming Territory: "I call upon you for troops to assist in quelling mobs within the borders of the state Penn[sylvani]a. . . ." Hayes still refused to act, and Hartranft, now on the way home, wired the next day from North Bend, Nebraska: "I amend my requisition from the general government by adding the words domestic insurrection exists in Pennsylvania which the state authorities are unable to suppress and the Legislature is not in session and cannot be convened in time." Finally, the governor, having arrived back in his state, wired the president that in his opinion the disturbances had "assumed the character of a general insurrection" which could not be sup-

pressed by the "organized forces" of either the state or federal governments, and he urged Hayes to consider calling for volunteers. At the same time, Scott and other railroad officials in Pennsylvania proposed to President Hayes that the strikers be considered as waging war against the United States.[47]

Late Wednesday, July 26, it was decided at a cabinet meeting that state and federal troops in Pennsylvania would begin on the following day to "open the road to Pittsburgh." After consulting with military and railroad authorities, Hartranft proposed to gather a large force and to proceed along the Pennsylvania Railroad's main line, opening up traffic along the way. On Thursday, therefore, using a special train furnished by the railroad as a mobile command post, the governor loaded three thousand U.S. regulars and twice that number of militia on special troop trains, picked up several Gatling guns and some ammunition in Harrisburg, and arrived at Altoona by Friday morning. There he issued orders to General Brinton at Blairsville to break camp and return to Pittsburgh. On Saturday morning, Brinton and Hartranft entered Pittsburgh with an overwhelming display of force. The strikers tried to confer with the governor, but he told them brusquely that he was not a mediator and was there only to restore order.[48]

One by one—at Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Altoona, and Pittsburgh—the critical points were forced open for traffic. Before the week was over, Reading was opened by four batteries of U.S. regulars.

On Monday, July 30, both the Pennsylvania and Reading companies announced that they would resume normal operations on the following day. General Hancock informed the War Department:

> The quiet occupation of Pittsburgh and opening of the Pennsylvania Railroad, I think, settles the question of order in this division, and the only trouble that seems to remain is that connected with the miners in certain points in the coal districts, such as Scranton. Possibly that may require similar treatment as that of the railroads.[49]

Governor Hartranft was the right man to dispense such "similar treatment." He left Pittsburgh with federal and state troops for the mining districts around Kingston, Plymouth, Natioke, Wilkes-Barre, and Scranton, and used the same tactics to break the miners' strikes as he had those of the railroad workers.

Scranton was the last city in Pennsylvania to be "conquered." On July 24, fifteen hundred workers of the Lackawanna Iron & Coal Company struck at noon "with a cheer," and at six that night they were followed by the firemen and brakemen of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western and Delaware & Hudson railroad companies. The stopping of the railroads forced the city's miners into idleness, and on Sunday, July 29, all of Scranton's thirty-five thousand workers were on strike.[50]

Wages in Scranton had been depressed to the starvation level. One worker reported that he had made $28.40 in June, and out of this had had to pay $9.40 for his tools, leaving $19.00 to support himself and his five dependents. His meals consisted of corn meal mush and a few potatoes from his little garden patch. His family had not eaten beef for half a year. Another worker said that he had averaged $14.00 per month over the past year, and that his employer still owed him for fifty-nine cars of coal. Thousands of families lived on such wages, and yet the companies kept reducing them. From September 1876 to July 1, 1877, employees of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Company saw their wages drop 35 percent. Little wonder that the men told a reporter that "death would be better than this battle for life in which they are constantly worsted." Yet, he commented, death was "too expensive, a funeral too costly a heritage for the living, and so they struggle on to keep body and soul together as a matter of economy."[51]

Because of the town's sympathies for the strikers, Mayor Robert H. McKune failed in his effort to form a citizens' corps and enroll special police. But W.W. Scranton, general manager of the Lackawanna Iron & Coal Company, organized a private force of 116 citizens into the "Scranton Citizens' Corps," and turned over the company's general store to be used for its general headquarters.

The group secured arms and drilled. However, the railroad official was not fully confident that the corps could handle the situation. He wrote to a friend in York:

> I trust when the troops come—if they ever get here—that we may have a conflict in which the mob shall be completely worsted. In no other way will the thing end with any security for property here in the future.[52]

Before the troops came, the "Scranton Citizens' Corps" killed six striking miners. On August 2, Brinton arrived with the First Division and completed the process of smashing the strike. On August 15, Governor Hartranft wrote to the secretary of war:

> The emergency for which the federal troops were brought into this State is over, but the situation in the mining regions is still very critical and for prudential reasons I request the retention for the present of such forces as are not needed elsewhere.[53]

So the army settled down to what amounted to an occupation of the coal region of eastern Pennsylvania. By mid-August, General Hancock had concentrated large numbers of troops in Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, and Mauch Chunk, with a smaller detachment in Reading.[54] Living conditions among the strikers and their families began to deteriorate rapidly. General Hancock reported that almost 100,000 men were idle and that they and their families were living on potatoes, wild berries, and whortleberries. The miners had little influence with the federal officers, but they made some efforts to win the sympathies of the enlisted men. General Hancock, worried, ordered that

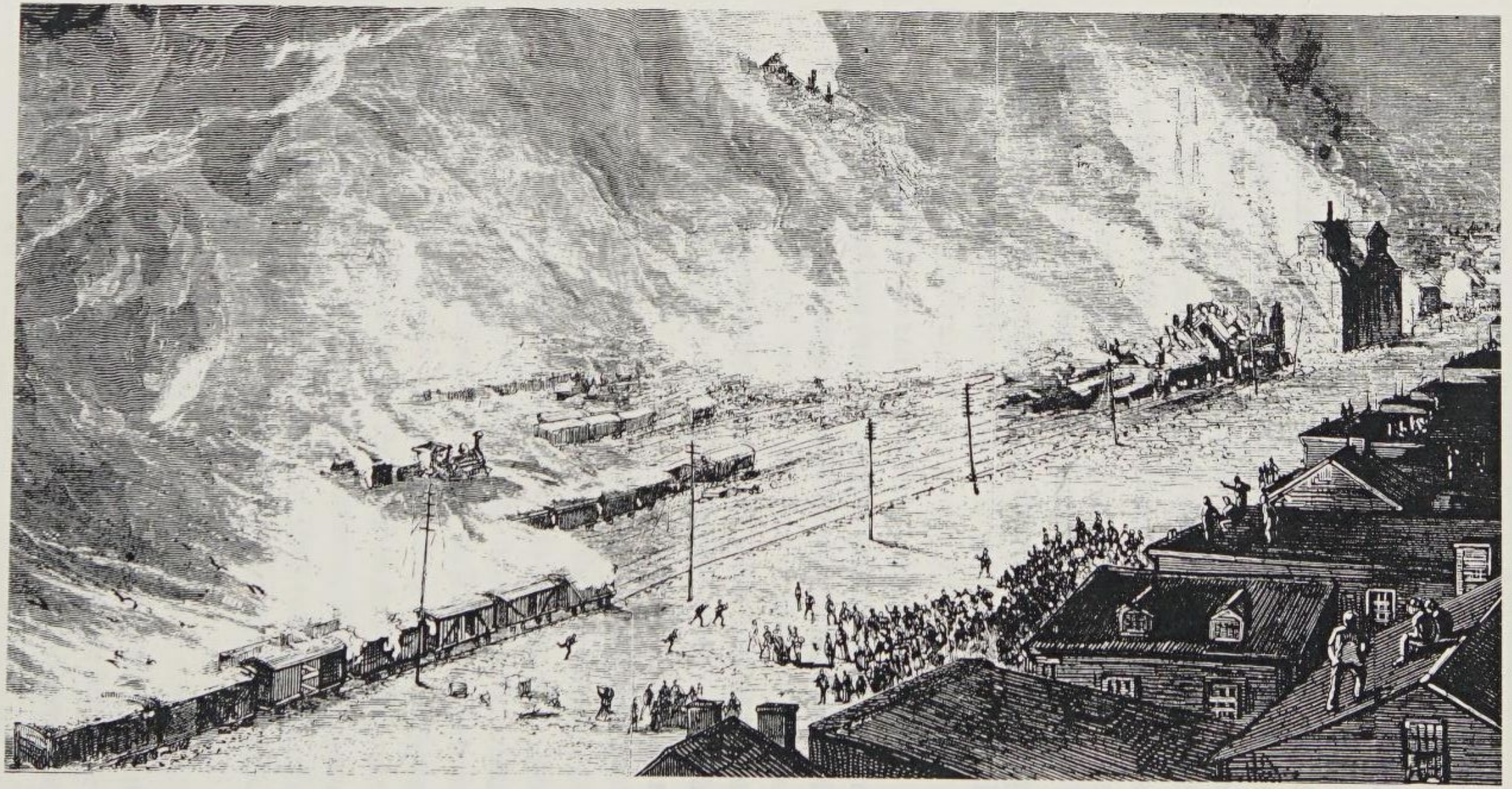
> . . . localities for summer camps of our troops in the disturbed regions should be somewhat removed from the influence of the strikers and persons in sympathy with them in recent disorders,

> whose influence might be brought to bear on their fellow foreign countrymen who may happen to be in our service. . . .[55]

The strike in Scranton and other mining regions lasted until mid-October, by which time the miners, although well organized and determined to stay out until they had achieved victory, were defeated by the federal troops.[56] On October 19, Governor Hartranft informed the president that the troops could be withdrawn. By October 30, the last of the troops had left Scranton with the blessings of the business community. The viewpoint of these citizens was expressed by the *Scranton Republican* as it bade the soldiers farewell:

> Their brief residence among us has revolutionized our views and opinions of army men in general, and henceforth, we shall always feel that we have friends among the national defenders. . . .[57]

Thus, the Great Strike came to an end in Pennsylvania, crushed by local police, militias, citizens' vigilante groups, United States marshals, and federal troops.



The wall of fire in Pittsburgh engulfs Pennsylvania Railroad freight trains and the Union Depot.